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D LP Ballard

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D LaPierre Ballard (1944-2022)

- Oklahoma's First Master
- Three-Time State Champion
- Defeated Bobby Fischer

by Tom Braunlich

D Ballard, one of Oklahoma's greatest players, passed away on February 9, 2022, at age 77. He was a mathematician, scholar, and computer programmer; but in chess he will forever be remembered as the first Oklahoman to earn the official master title, and one of only two Okies to ever beat Bobby Fischer. That famous Fischer game is examined in detail in this issue's "Game of the Month," page 14, and below we will also see Ballard's description of his conversation with Fischer.

I hope all young Oklahoma players will read this recap of Ballard's career — he is someone they need to know, and he is an example of how chess can be a wonderful companion throughout one's entire life.

Much of this discussion comes from an interview I did with Joe Hill, Ballard's long-time best friend of some 60 years. We will also have comments from Ross Carbonell, Jim Berry, and others.

D LaPierre Ballard (he said his first name is simply "D" - pronounced "Dee" - not an initial) was born on August 20, 1944. He grew up in Midwest City, OK, and was

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graduated from Midwest City High School in 1962. D went on to receive a Bachelor's Degree in Physics from the University of Oklahoma, and in Computer Science from UCO. He married Judith Ann Crouch on December 31, 1983 at Walters, OK, making their home in Oklahoma City, where they had a daughter, Alisa. He worked and retired as a Computer Programmer for the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System.

D had a "passion" for chess from a young age, but he didn't play in tournaments until he got into college in 1962 at OU, and his chess career was anything but conventional.

As a chess player his career blasted off like the proverbial skyrocket. In just two years he went from an initial rating of 1400 to over 2000 in 1964 when he won the state championship! That same year he defeated Fischer in a very impressive game.

He went on to take Oklahoma State Champion title twice more, in 1966 and 1971. He was active as a tournament player for only 12 years, from 1962-1974, although he went on to other chess and math adventures; but before discussing that let's see how it was he developed so fast.

Ballard, Hill, and Carson at OU

A rare chess synchronicity occurred at OU in 1962. Three future expert players found themselves rooming together in the same dormitory, on the same floor — D Ballard, Joe Hill, and Keith Carson.

Both Keith and Joe went on to Expert rank at chess, and D went on to Master. The three of them were always at the chessboard, and spent hours exploring it together.

"At first I was a little bit stronger, but he quickly outgrew me," Hill said.

"His first year or two at OU, D spent all of his time at chess. He hardly ever went to class. All he wanted to do was study the game — and he did so with intense focus. When he discovered there was chess books in the school library in German, he spent about

In just two years he went from an initial rating of 1400 to over 2000 in 1964 when he won the state championship! That same year he defeated Fischer in a very impressive game.

45 actual credit hours learning to speak the German language so that he could read them … enough hours for a minor degree in it. And later he learned that Russian was the real chess language to learn, so he spent another 20-30 credit hours learning that. (Years later his daughter, Alisa, got a PhD in Russian Studies.)"

Modern players need to realize that in those days quality information about chess was rare and hard to get, and avid players thirsted for it. Ballard even subscribed to the Russian chess publication *Shakmatny Bulletin,* which helped him beat Fischer, see page 14.

Ballard in 2016 with Frank Berry and Joe Hill.

Hill recalls, "D was extremely focused on both playing and studying. I was impressed. He was like that with everything he did in life; once he set his mind on something he delved into it. His favorite master was Lasker, and he loved to talk about him with Keith and me. … And he liked to improve by practicing blindfold play."

They all started participating in tournaments regularly and continued throughout their college years. "D would say, 'There's a tournament in so-and-so; let's go!" Hill said.

"In college, D's pattern during his initial years was seen in his calculus courses. He took the first course and flunked it because he was studying chess so much, then took it again and got an 'A'. That happened for all three of his calculus classes. Later on his mother forced him to reduce chess and concentrate more seriously on school. He graduated with a degree in physics, and later another degree in mathematics, but soon went to work for the state working on budgeting stuff at the capitol. … Even after school he spent much time playing chess, and his mother again had to steer him into focusing more on his family obligations and career."

Defeating Bobby Fischer

On April 4, 1964, D beat Bobby Fischer in a simultaneous event in Wichita, Kansas.

Fischer had gone on a nationwide tour that year doing exhibitions all over the country, and had generally demolished the best amateur players each region could offer. He had few losses, but one of them was to Ballard, who was a year younger than Fischer.

In Wichita, Bobby took on 40 players, most of them strong veteran players from Kansas and Oklahoma, including Ballard and Carson.

Bobby Fischer (middle) at Wichita 1964 with four top Okie tournament players of the time. Pictured left to right are Keith Carson, Bob Michaelson, Fischer, D Ballard, Charles Wayne Carson. (Photo: Balcro.com)

"They drove up to Wichita for the event, and had to pay $5 to play in the simul, which was a lot for a broke college kid like Ballard at the time," Hill remembers. The story of the game is presented in "Game of the Month," but here is Ballard's own description, written in 2008:

> "D was a good man, and one of a kind."
> — IM John Donaldson
>
> "A distinguished courteous man."
> — Bill Sparks

"In Wichita Bobby lost one game, drew two and won the rest. I was the one who won against him. Additionally, I had gotten to visit with him for fifteen or twenty minutes prior to the exhibition, just the two of us. Bobby told me … that the American chess player Paul Morphy was the most talented chess player of all time and that Morphy would have dominated the chess world in 1964, had Morphy lived then, just as he had done in 1857-1858.

When I congratulated Bobby on winning the U.S. Championship by the score of 11-0 just a few months previously, I asked him how he did it. He shrugged his shoulders and held his hands with palms upward to tell me that he did not know. During the conversation, he referred to various historically significant chess games just as if I was a master class or better player and just as if I was also familiar with them. I was quite flattered by this. He was very friendly and polite to me. He had a quite strong Brooklyn accent." —D Ballard, January 20, 2008.

I asked Ross Carbonell, the only other Okie to beat Fischer, if he had ever discussed it with Ballard. Here's the story he told:

"I met the friendly and pleasant D La Pierre Ballard six or seven years ago at the Barnes and Noble coffee shop in Oklahoma City. … Since we both had beaten Fischer in 1964, he in Wichita and me in Houston, we compared notes.

Ballard wanted to know the details of my game with Fischer and how I felt about the result. I told him that during the game I came up with a simple but deadly three or four

move counter-trap. When Fisher came to my table I made my move. Instantly, he grabbed his king and laid it flat on the chessboard, looked at me and said, "I was well aware of that combination, but forgot about it when around other boards." And with a shrug and a tilt of his head he moved on. Startled, I remained silent. Wow!! I had beaten the great Robert J. Fischer, the would-be World Chess Champion. To this day I still can't believe it. The many kibitzers around congratulated me with many handshakes. … I felt great, just great.

Ballard, with a broad and understanding smile, told me that he felt exactly the same way when he beat Fischer. I never saw or heard from Ballard again until I heard the sad news he'd passed away." (Ross Carbonell)

Clearly Fischer was an inspiration to Ballard and many other young players like Carson and Carbonell of the time. However Ballard himself wrote that his chess was mostly inspired by the great masters of the past like Lasker. He likened his own style to that of the great Akiba Rubinstein in an article he wrote for his website Balcro.com. I hope to publish that and another article about "Thinking in Chess" in the next issue of this magazine.

Chasing the Master Title

Perhaps Ballard's greatest chess achievement was to reach 2200 rating and earn the master title — *at a time when virtually no one else in the state was rated over 2000!*

During this time he battled with rivals like perennial state champ Bela Rozsa, as well as Victor McBee, George Hulburd, the Berry brothers, Bill Devin, and others.

Ballard's goal was to reach 2200 to earn the master title. This would be a real achievement in a state where no one else was rated over 2000 with the exception of Rozsa, who was mostly retired, and occasionally McBee. To raise one's rating 200 points above the rest of the rating pool is very hard. Ballard often played in Texas in search of easier points.

By 1974 his rating was at 2175 and he made a final run for it that summer by playing in many events.

By October he was 2195 and played in the 1974 Tulsa Open. This was one of my own first tournaments, and I remember being very excited to see Ballard there, as he was somewhat of a legend for local players my age. I remember that towards the end of round 2 there was a kerfuffle around the top board with some muffled backslapping and scattered applause. Ballard had won his game (against former state champion Eugene Amburn, I believe).

I asked TD Larry Broukal what was going on. Broukal said, "He did it!" He explained that Ballard was withdrawing from the event after just two rounds, as he'd calculated his rating would go over 2200 and he wanted to see it published. It came out at 2205.

One of the cruelties of USCF chess at the time was that if your rating was published over 2200, you were a Master — but it was not a permanent title. If your rating dipped down below 2200 you had the title no more.

Considering how hard he had worked for it, there's no surprise that Ballard didn't want to risk it by playing in another tournament. He retired, and never played traditional tournament chess again. Later on USCF changed the title to "National Master" and awarded it permanently (with a certificate) to anyone who ever reached 2200, so that players would not withdraw from the game as Ballard did. (It happened to others too.)

Ballard's tournament chess career was short. Otherwise no doubt he would have more than 'just' three state titles.

I didn't see Ballard again until 1979 when he played in a "rapid" chess event at OSU. This was an informal unrated tourney.

At the RRSO 2008 with me (left) and the late Odell Hall.

Ballard had somehow been talked into participating. I was rated 2050 then, and thought I was pretty good, but he won our game nicely in a positional squeeze. It was clear to me he was still the best player in the state and would have won the state title several more times if he'd stayed active. It was the only game we ever played.

However, once chess gets in your blood you can never really quit it. Ballard instead became active in correspondence chess.

"In 1970 he told me that he had 105 correspondence games (with post cards) going at the same time," Jim Berry recalls. "He would spend two minutes a move just like over the board."

He became even more active in it after 1974 and continued so into the 1990s. Apparently he was not particularly serious about it as by this time he was well into his career as a computer programmer, and busy with his new family.

Prime Numbers

D had many hobbies, including poetry and genealogy. D created the Teapro Programming language in 1998, and used it especially as a tool for the exploration of prime numbers.

Ballard was a world-class expert in that esoteric field. A *prime number* is a natural number that can't be formed by multiplying two smaller natural numbers. This field has interesting applications in math and physics, but Ballard was into the enigmatic weeds of it. His research is published on his website balcro.com if you are interested.

In particular D was fascinated by the hunt for *Hargrave Primes* — unusually dense clusters of primes among numbers of 20 digits or higher. At that level there are occasionally bizarre groupings of primes very close together.

"D loved prime numbers," Joe Hill says. "He had four computers going full-time searching for those primes. Never stopped. He was always talking about it."

> "Prime numbers are the only thing in the whole universe that are absolutely the same everywhere and that are easily understandable." — D Ballard

Return to Tournaments

In 2008 Frank Berry talked Ballard into playing in the always-amusing Red River Shootout, where he played a two game match with veteran Texas NM Mike Richards at a rapid time control of G/60+5. He scored one draw and one loss in the match — but the loss was a humdinger of a game that D should have won. I analyze it in the games section below. With this result D showed he still had skills! Later he played in a couple small G/25 chess events in OKC that I directed. (A game from that with Mike Sullivan is also below.)

Retirement Years

Joe Hill had kept in touch with D over the years. Even when they lived far apart while Joe was in the army they'd get together for a dinner whenever possible, and after they both retired in the OKC area they stayed in touch every week by phone.

Joe recalls, "He called me once a week, always on a Thursday. D had become an avid vegetarian and he would always start the call by saying, 'What have you eaten?' He wanted me to become a vegetarian too. He knew he'd never get me to stop eating hamburgers, but he always tried anyway; it was a running joke between us, I guess. After the joke we'd talk on the phone about history, or what is happening in chess, or whatever."

D kept in touch with Joe right up to the end, "… which came VERY suddenly. He went in for an operation and it turned out to be cancer. I didn't even know he'd passed away until his wife called after the fact. It was a shock… There was none to compare with D Ballard. I consider myself fortunate to have known him. I miss our long talks together. …

D was a very impressive person. … I was as close to him as I anyone else I've ever known. I consider myself to be blessed."

Ballard's Chess Legacy

Jim Berry described D Ballard as one of the two greatest homegrown chess players from Oklahoma. "The first great chess player in Oklahoma history was Dr. Bela Rosza, professor of music at TU, and 11-time state champion. He was from Hungary. The second great player in Oklahoma history was D LP Ballard, who learned his chess here in Oklahoma."

Joe Hill says, "There was no one who could hold a candle to D Ballard. He was simply outstanding at the chess table. … Frankly, he beat the *stuffins* out of Fischer that one time. And he also consistently beat Ken Smith of Texas when they played. Smith was a Senior Master (2400+) and an idol among the players in this region — but D could beat him."

The last time I saw D was in 2018 when he came to Tulsa to observe the Blindfold Exhibition put on by GM Timur Gareev at the FKB Memorial.

At the Gareev Exhibition in 2018. With new friend Veronika Zilajeva (who won the prestigious Ruth Haring National Championship for girls that year), and Harold Brown, Jim Berry, D Ballard, and Joe Hill.

We had a good talk and it was clear his understanding of what was going on in the chess world was still sharp. I said if I'd have known he was going to attend I might have arranged for him to be one of the players in Gareev's simul. But that would have been unfair to the grandmaster!

How would I put into context Ballard's chess legacy? Oklahoma has had many important masters over the years, some homegrown and some transplants, and sometimes my name is mentioned among them since my rating peaked at 2365 in the '80s when I was good. However, I would not put myself in Ballard's company. I agree with Jim Berry that Ballard and Bela Rozsa are the two standout chess figures in the state in terms of their talent and influence on the history of chess here. If they had been living in a chess center like New York or Chicago they would both have earned Senior Master status (2400+), especially Ballard. But playing only in Oklahoma and Texas in the 50s and 60s they simply did not have nearly as much opportunity as offered in the big cities, and *far* less opportunity than is available to ALL players today. You see glimpses of this in their careers when they did have a rare chance to play famous players and took some big scalps. With more chances against such players Ballard would have earned more honors.

I would also place Tom Amburn into this top category, for the same reasons.

Current Okie homegrown masters like Howard Zhong and Ryan Amburgy will surpass all these players if they continue competing in chess. And of course we could add transplant IM Advait Patel who lived here for several years but now lives in Toronto. But, let's face it; they have *already* had more opportunity – by far – in their young lives than Ballard, had in his entire career. Even influential "Fischer Boom" masters like me, Unruh, Hulsey, and others enjoyed more chess opportunities than Ballard had. Nowadays everyone gets to regularly interact with strong NMs and GMs. But the groundwork for this was laid by players like Ballard, as well as the many organizers like Jerry Spann and the Berry brothers who kept chess percolating here for so long.

Ballard deserves to be at the top of any list of great chess figures from Oklahoma.

He influenced all of us like Bobby Fischer influenced him. … The legacy lives on.

ERIC JONES
1950-2022

by Bruce Wells

Eric Robert Jones passed away Jan 15, 2022. He was a distinguished lawyer and a strong Class-A player from Ardmore, Oklahoma, with a rating of 1926 USCF at his peak.

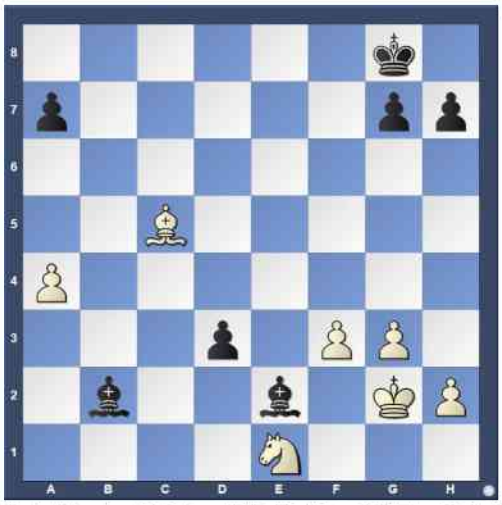
He attended Tulane University in New Orleans in the 1970s, where he won the chess championship four years in a row. He earned a Juris Doctorate degree in 1976, and then returned to Ardmore where he practiced as an attorney and was a proud member of the Bar of Supreme Court of Oklahoma.

Bruce Wells said of Jones, "In his off time, he loved listening to Classical music, plus was an avid builder of models. He also enjoyed playing chess with his friends at the Ardmore, Oklahoma chess club. He was the club's highest rated player. Even years later he still had a sharp and keen mind even though he dropped below 1800 still managed to play well. … RIP Eric will miss you across the board."

Jones was a feared tournament competitor up through the mid-90s but played sporadically after that, mostly with several appearances at the Red River Shootout. Here is one of his games from that event:

Hollingsworth, Jim (1804)
Jones, Eric (1748) [C43]
RRSO # 8 Davis (1.20), 18.04.2010

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.d4 Nxe4 4.dxe5 d5 5.Bd3 Bf5 6.0-0 Nc6 7.Bb5 Be7 8.Bxc6+ bxc6 9.Nd4 Qd7 10.c3 0-0 11.Qa4 c5 12.Qxd7 Bxd7 13.Nc2 Rad8 14.f3 Ng5 15.Be3 Ne6 16.Nd2 d4 17.cxd4 Bb5 18.Rfc1 cxd4 19.Bf2 c5 20.a4 Be2 21.g3 f6! 22.exf6 Bxf6 23.Ne1 d3 24.Ra2 Rf7 25.Kg2 Rc7Ê 26.b3 Rdc8 27.Nc4 Nd4 28.Nd2 Rb7 29.Be3 Nxb3 30.Nxb3 Rxb3 31.Rxc5 Rxc5 32.Bxc5 Rb2 33.Rxb2 Bxb2



34.Bb4 Bd4 35.Bd2 Kf7 36.f4 Ke6ñ+ 37.Nf3 Bxf3+ 38.Kxf3 Kd5 39.g4 Kc4 40.f5 Bc3 41.Ke3 Kb3? [The players trade mistakes here, probably in time pressure. Instead 41…Bf6 with the idea of …Bg5+ would have capped a nice positional win for Eric.] **42.a5?** [And 42.Kxd3 would have won for Jim.] **42...Kc2 43.Bxc3 Kxc3 44.g5 d2 45.f6 gxf6 46.gxf6 d1Q 47.Ke4 Qd7 48.Ke5 Kb4 49.a6 Kb5 50.h4 Kxa6** [White resigned.] **0-1**

REALITY CHECK

by NM and ICCM Bart Gibbons

YOUNG SPASSKY LEARNS A HARD LESSON FROM TAL

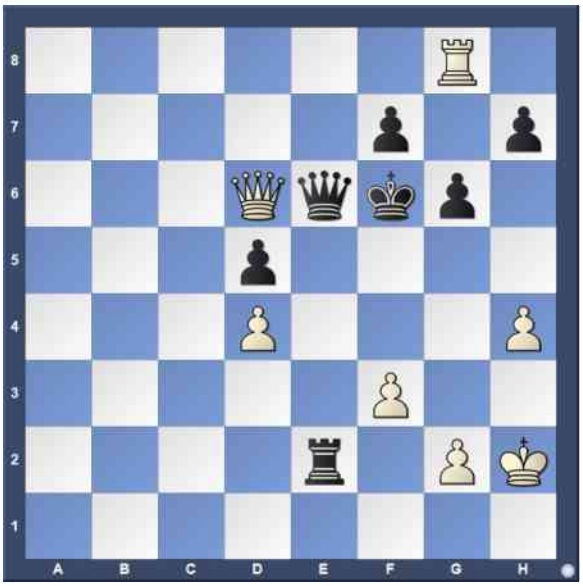
Wherever tournament chess is played aggressively, as in Oklahoma, I've noticed a common trend that seems to be on the rise — playing too hard to win, and ending up losing instead. Players lose objectivity, and go overboard. It's an old problem, but perhaps Internet play is increasing it.

Ideally, a strong chessplayer will realistically evaluate a position as either better for White or Black, or equal chances. However, as the tournament is in its final phase, particularly in the last round, players start to project where they want to finish in the standings. At such a time, a player's emotions can influence them to continue to play for a win when they no longer have the advantage. Refusing a draw offer in a worse position is a good indicator of this state of mind.

Let's look at an instructive example.

The position at right is from the adjourned position of the game ***Spassky - Tal***, from the last round of the ***1958 USSR Championship***. (See photo too.)

(For young players, in those days after five hours of play they would adjourn the game and restart it the next day. Players would have all night to study the position, and their friends and 'seconds' could help them.)



The tournament results were of the utmost importance, as the top four would qualify for the 1958 Interzonal (the first stage in the World Championship cycle).

Going into the last round the standings were:

- Tal and Petrosian — 11.5 points.
- Bronstein — 11 points.
- Spassky and Averbakh — 10.5 points.

The games Averbakh-Petrosian and Bronstein-Korchnoi were both drawn, setting the stage for the Spassky-Tal game to determine the final qualifiers. *Both players had strong reason to play for a win.* Tal

TOP 25

For APRIL 2022

IM Patel removed from list for 2+ years inactivity.

Active Oklahoma Players				
	Player	This Month	Change	
1	Ryan Amburgy	2314	25	▲
2	Howard Zhong	2302	0	▲
3	Tom Braunlich	2200	0	▲
4	Mark Hulsey	2153	0	▲
5	David Zelnick	2108	0	▲
6	Charles D Unruh	2085	0	▲
7	Veronika Zilajeva	2084	0	▲
8	Anthony Paolercio	2080	0	▲
9	Charles M Unruh	2049	0	▲
10	Tom Patton	2048	0	▲
11	David Luscomb	2045	-7	▼
12	Matt Dalthorp	2044	0	▲
13	James Long	2041	0	▲
14	Jeff Colbert	2008	0	▲
15	Stephen Gehly	2000	0	▲
16	Logan Zachare	1940	0	▲
17	Maxwell Barnes	1934	-24	▼
18	Jerry Casteel	1929	0	▲
19	Wayne Hatcher	1926	0	▲
20	Joe Dean Veal	1904	-20	▲
21	Harold Brown Jr.	1901	0	▲
22	Oscar Wang	1879	-46	▼
23	Maxwell Xie	1856	0	▲
24	Adley Bufford	1829	1	▲
25	Chris Dooley	1821	21	▲

Player of the Month

D LaPIERRE BALLARD

What other choice for the POTM is possible?

would qualify even with a loss, but a win would jump him ahead of Petrosian to become Soviet Champion. Spassky needed a win to qualify, but also a draw would force a playoff between he and Averbakh for the final Interzonal spot. A loss gets him nothing.

The game was resumed the next morning. Spassky met Petrosian in the tournament hall, and with a smile said to the future World Champion "Today you will become (USSR) champion." (Meaning he intended to win the game.) Petrosian did not reply.

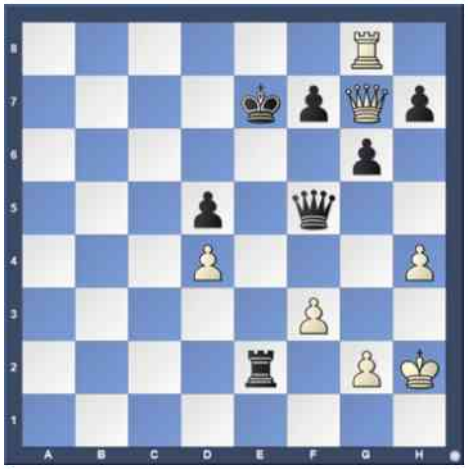
In the diagram position, Spassky held a slight initiative against Tal's exposed king, and justly played for a win (evaluation by Stockfish).

Play continued

46 Qf4+ Qf5

(Better was ...Ke7, when Black should have no problems holding the draw)

47 Qh6 Ke7 48 Qf8+ Kf6 49 Qg7+ Ke7



50 Ra8 Qd7 51 Qf8+?!

(Stockfish gives 51 Qh8 as stronger)

Kf6 52 Ra6 Re6 53 Qh8+ Ke7 54 Ra8 Re1?

(...h5) Both sides make mistakes hereabouts.

55 Kg3? (Rc8) **...h5?**

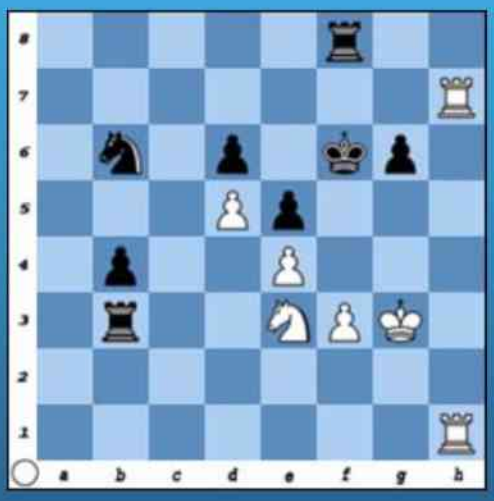
(...Qc7+ 56 Kf2 Re6 is equal, per Stockfish)

56 Kf2 (now White is winning)

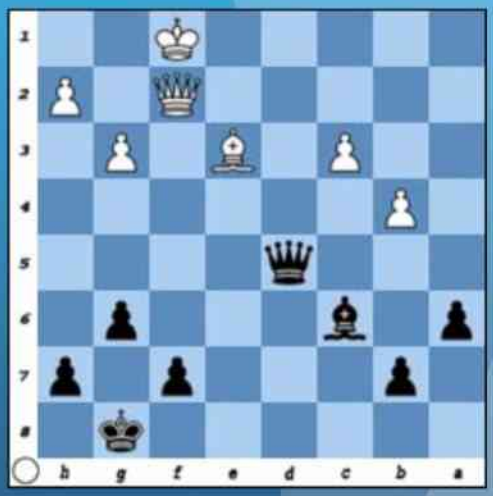
56...Re6

PUZZLES

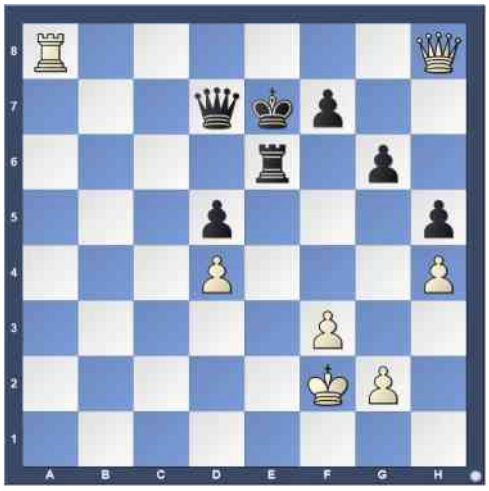
Answers Next Page



White to move and win. (Easy)



Black to move and win. (Difficult)



This is the critical position. White can start to weave a net around the Black king with 57 Qb8! threatening to win Black's queen with 58 Ra7. If 57...Kf6, then 58 g4! hg4 59 fg4 Re4 60 Qh8+ Ke7 61 Qf8+ Ke6 62 Ra6+ wins.

The struggle continued:

57 Rc8 Rd6?

(Rb6 is best)

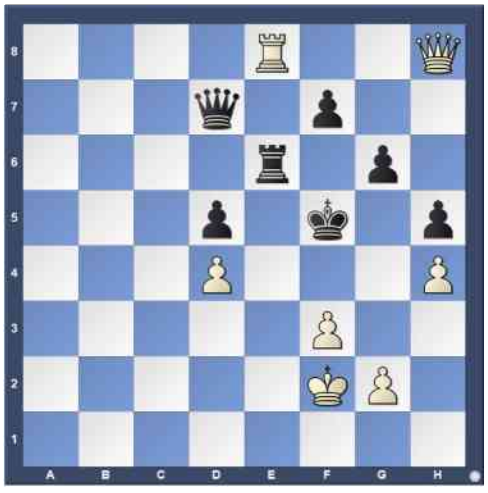
58 Qf8+ Kf6 59 Re8?

White can still play for the same plan as mentioned above with 59 Qh8+ Ke7 60 Ra8. Spassky tries to force matters with the rook on the 8th rank, but it needed to be where it can check on the 6th rank.

59...Re6 60 Qh8+ Kf5 61 Qh6 Kf6

(White's rook is taboo; if ...Rxe8 62 Qg5+ Ke6 63 Qe5 mate)

62 Qh8 Kf5



Tal remarks in *"The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal"* that White should now accept a draw by repetition (with 63.Qh6, Kf6 etc.) Instead, we see

Answers to the Puzzles

(1) White has a cute forced mate with 1. Ng4+, Kg5 2. R1h5+! gxh5 3. Rg7 mate.

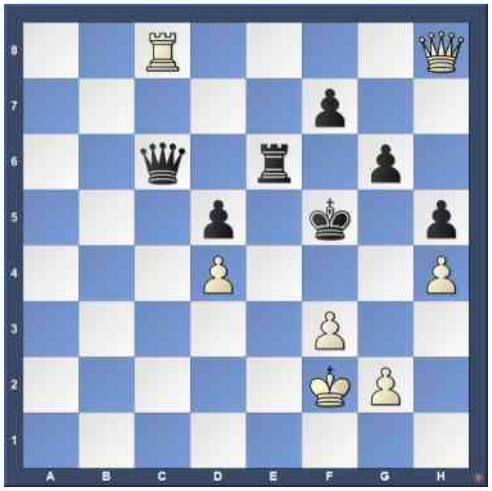
(2) Black wins with 1…Qd1+ 2. Qe1, Bg2+! 3. Kf2, (otherwise the queen is lost) … Qf3+ 4. Kg1, Bh3 and white's king has been cornered. He has no way to prevent mate on the light squares now. Note how black's bishop was a bystander the whole time.

Spassky continuing by momentum to press for the win, and getting gradually outplayed.

63 Rd8? Qc6

Now Black has threats of checks on the second rank, with obvious counterplay, and both players realized that the tide was turning.

64 Rc8

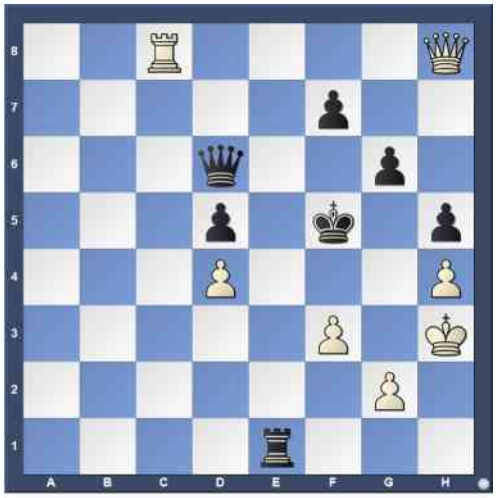


Spassky offered a draw.

64…Qa6

Tal said, "let's play a little more."

65 Kg3 Qd6+ 66 Kh3 Re1



67 g3?

(Missing g4+ hg4 68 fg4+ Ke4 69 Qe8+, drawing — just barely.)

67…Rg1 68 f4 Re1 (…Ke4) **69 Rc2?**

(better is Re8)

69…Qe6

Now Black is winning.

70 Rf2?

(70 Qc8 holds out longer)

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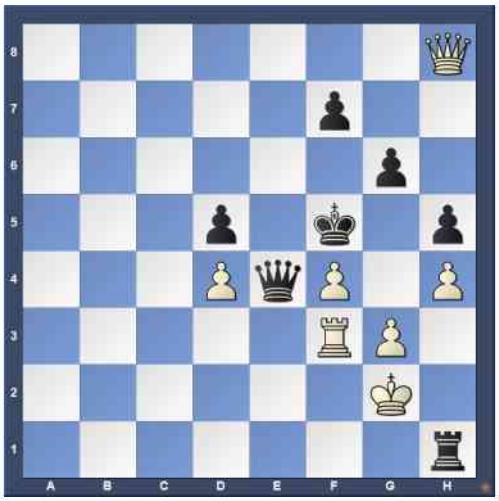
70…Rh1+ 71 Kg2 Qe4+ 72 Rf3



72… Kg4 73 Qc8+ f5

0-1 White resigns. If 74 Qc3 Rh3 breaks through.

The dramatic conclusion made Tal the USSR champion for the second straight year. His jubilant hometown fans (the event was held in Riga) carried him off the stage, while Spassky wept openly in the street.

For Tal, this began a magical era, which would see him win the 1959 Candidate's Tournament, and the World Championship in 1960. It would not be until 1964 that Spassky qualified for an Interzonal again (he played in the 1955 Interzonal in Sweden).

Advice on Pressing for the Win

Spassky's failure primarily came from **stubbornness in the face of common sense. He had no reason to avoid a playoff; in fact, he had a lifetime plus score against Averbakh.**

One suggestion on how to be objective about a position is to look at the position from your opponent's side of the board, as Tal does in this photo!

Analyzing the position with the other color's pieces in front of you would help you gain insight into what your opponent is thinking about.

One player who used a mobile device for online play said he frequently flipped the board around for this purpose. Be respectful of your opponent if you stand behind him or her; do not be too close to the board as to distract their attention.

Another idea is to imagine you were giving a lesson about the position to a student, and you had to explain what the correct evaluation of the position was.

After Black's 62nd move, if Spassky had been more objective, he would have realized that Black's pieces were more active than they were at adjournment. In addition, the last two moves repeated the position, with nothing gained, and White's own King was somewhat exposed.

In short, this should have shown that White no longer had the initiative, and a draw was the logical result.

KANSAS CHANGES

Laurence Coker is stepping down from many positions in KCA leadership. He has been an important mover of Kansas chess since 2004, including its website since 2002. New KCA President Kyle Camarda is replacing him in almost all of his positions, including treasurer. Coker will remain as secretary, and also as moderator for "Kansas Chess" group on Facebook (which is not is not affiliated with Kansas Chess Association, though a lot of members of group are also members of KCA). I hope the players there appreciate his consistency and dedication.

The KCA also announced the **Kansas Open** will be July 22-24 in Wichita.

TWILIGHT ZONE CHESS MYSTERY

Shaun Graham sends in this strange photo taken from episode 24 of the Twilight Zone and asks if anyone has ever seen a 'cover' like this used for a chessboard, and why:

Shaun explains, "In the scene, the visitor says, 'I believe it was my move' before lifting up the cover and resuming the game. It was probably a way to keep dust off, and also not disturb the pieces, in between visits. Perhaps when clocks weren't as common, the games lasted so long that the dust might settle. … I hope too much dust doesn't settle on mine. She hasn't had a real game played on her in quite some time."

I wonder if perhaps the cover protects the game from curious cats? Has anyone ever seen a chess cover like this?

OKLAHOMA SENIOR OPEN

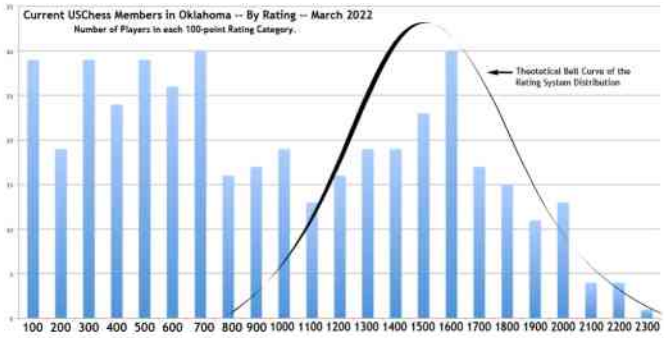
The Oklahoma Senior Open and Championship is April 2-3 in Stroud and has four NMs in the lineup. Should be good spectating and you can play if you are over age 50, with free entry fee. (See tournament announcements.)

RED RIVER SHOOTOUT RETURNS

The annual RRSO team tournament returns on April 23, in Davis, OK. If interested, contact the team captain soon. (Jim Berry, JABerryCG@aol.com)

OKLAHOMA PLAYER RATING DISTRIBUTION

Here are recent graphs for the rating distributions of Oklahoma players. Current members in blue, all rated players in red.


Current USChess Members in Oklahoma -- By Rating -- March 2022
Number of Players in each 100-point Rating Category.
Theoretical Bell Curve of the Rating System Distribution
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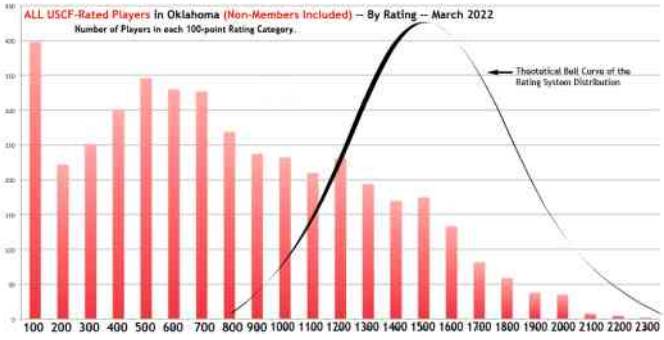

ALL USCF-Rated Players in Oklahoma (Non-Members Included) -- By Rating -- March 2022
Number of Players in each 100-point Rating Category.
Theoretical Bell Curve of the Rating System Distribution
100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400 1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000 2100 2200 2300

Bobby Fischer
D LaPierre Ballard
Simul Tour - Wichita 1964 KS, 04.04.1964
[Notes by TB]

This is Ballard's famous game. It's been printed before in many places, including in IM John Donaldson's recent authoritative book *Bobby Fischer and His World*, with his notes.

For my notes here I'm going to talk about what we can see in Ballard's skill and learn from his play here.

Ballard said Fischer gave a talk before the simul showing his famous win over Geller at Bled 1961, in which he said 'I always play pawn to King four for my first move just like Steinitz did before he got old!" He played it on all the boards in Wichita.

This predictability worked against him at simuls like this, however. Strong opponents like Ballard could prepare a line against his 1.e4 move. In this case Ballard prepares a classical Dragon setup and steers the game into a line he had just read about in the latest issue of *Shakmatny Bulletin*, the premier Russian (Soviet) chess magazine. Fischer himself had not read that article yet!

This is remarkable. Ballard had been playing tournament chess for only about two years, and yet he was able to spring a new theoretical move on Fischer deep in a main line Dragon! It was rare at that time for ANYONE to read the *Shakmatny Bulletin* in the USA. So already in the opening we see how strong a player Ballard was becoming, even though he was still young at this time (19), and he was just at the beginning of his chess career.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.Nc3 Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Bc4

Fischer playing the above move, Bc4, against Ballard at the simul in Wichita. (Photo: balcro.com)

Fischer loved to attack the dragon with this Sozin-style Bc4 development and a lightning attack with h4-h5 etc. He won many games against GMs that way.

7...0-0 8.Bb3

This move is to avoid possibilities of ...d5.

8...Ng4

With the move order Ballard has used, this move becomes possible, leading to some piece exchanges.

9.Qxg4 Nxd4 10.Qd1 Nxb3 11.axb3 b6 12.Bd4

(See diagram next page)

12...f6!?

This move is from the Russian article. Fischer was familiar with it, but not Ballard's follow-up. The natural move previously played here was 12...Bb7 but after 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.h4 White had won many games attacking the weakened black kingside.

13.h4

You might be asking whether Fischer overlooked a combo to win the exchange with 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Qd5+ e6 15.Qxa8. The answer is no ... this trap was known by both players at the time. White's queen gets in some trouble 15...Bxc3+ 16.bxc3 Qc7 17.0-0 a5! leads to the Q getting trapped. 0-1 (39) Kotkov-Zaitsev Moscow 1962. Still this snares white players even today.

13...Bb7 14.h5

14...Kf7!?

This is the "new move" discussed in the Russian magazine, which Fischer hadn't seen yet.

Later "theory" switched to the logical move 14...d5 due to this GM game: 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.exd5 Bxd5 17.Qg4 Bxg2 18.Qxg2 Qxd4 19.Qxg6 Qe5+ 20.Kf1 Qg5 21.Qe4 Rad8 22.Re1 Rf7 23.Re3 f5 24.Qc4 Rd4 25.Qc8+ Bf8 26.Rg1 Rg4 27.Rxg4 fxg4 28.Re4 Qc1+ 29.Kg2 Qxc2 30.Rxg4+ Kh7 0-1 Shabalov-Rausis, Riga 1989. However, there have not been many games with this line since then. It appears master players now steer away from this entire variation.

Ballard's ...Kf7 had only be played once before in an obscure Russian tournament in 1962, but had been discussed in that article.

15.Qg4

[Typical Fischer aggression, targeting g6 and preparing 0-0-0.]

15...d5

This is the 'thematic' break black was hoping for, but it introduces a lot of dangerous tactics. It's also possible to develop: 15...Qc7.

16.exd5 Bxd5 17.0-0-0 Be6 18.Qg3

18...Qb8

This move is another indicator of Ballard's skill. Black's Q was under threat from the R on d1 — but where to move it? Black's unusual defensive setup on the kingside looks awkward, but if he can trade Qs the endgame will favor him. Ballard's move 'wins a tempo' by offering the trade, and after Fischer's response...

19.Qf3

Ballard follows with...

19...Qc8

...gaining a tempo with the threat of ...Bg4.

20.Ne4

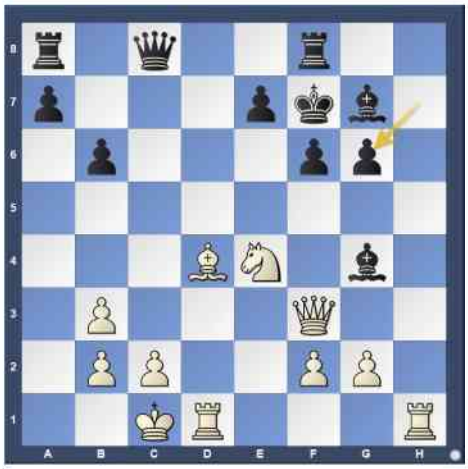
Did Fischer simply overlook Ballard's next move as some commentators have said? – I don't think so.

True, Fischer was playing 40 games simultaneously against many of the best players in the region, and with so many games swirling in his head, it is not unusual for a GM to get swept up in his own ideas and overlook opponent's threats. What's more remarkable is how seldom they do this and how many fine games Fischer played in simuls.

But here, I think Fischer was well aware …Bg4 was there, but he overlooked something else on move 24 and thought he was creating a trap for Ballard here. *That* was the error.

[The position was objectively about even, and Fischer could have tried something like 20.hxg6+ hxg6 21.Rh7!? Bg4 22.Qd5+ Be6 23.Qe4 Bf5 24.Qe3 with ideas of Qh6, and if then 24...g5!? 25.Rxg7+ Kxg7 26.Qxe7+ with interesting play.]

20...Bg4 21.hxg6+ hxg6



22.Qd3

It's here I believe Fischer comprehended his mistake. I think he had planned the strong-looking check 22.Ng5+ here, and only now realized it doesn't work. Black would have to be very careful, but after 22...Kg8 23.Qe4 *(23.Qd5+ e6* was a dead end for Fischer.*)* 23...Bxd1 24.Qxg6 Fischer's mating attack would have been stopped by 24…Qxc2+! (the move I think Fischer may have overlooked) 25.Qxc2 Bxc2 26.Ne6 Rfc8 and black wins easily. Therefore Fischer has to acquiesce to the loss of the exchange to keep the game alive. Still, he keeps up the pressure. Ballard has to play well to win it, witch lots of kibitzers watching...

22...Bxd1 23.Rxd1

So black is objectively winning. But who would be confident of winning this position against one of the best players of all time? Would you? It's not easy in any sense, and most of us would fail. Ballard still had to work hard.

23...Qc6 24.Rh1 Rac8 25.c3 Rh8 26.Re1

26…Rhd8!

Ballard has finished his development and defended Fischer's threats. Now with this move he starts to get some initiative going, with threats of ...e5.

27.f4 Qd5!

[Now he has threats of ...Qxb3 as well as ...Bh6, etc.]

28.Kb1

[28.Qc2 Bh6 was winning material for black.]

28...Qxb3 29.f5 [Fischer goes for broke.]

29...gxf5

30.Ng5+ fxg5 31.Qxf5+

Fischer is down a rook now, but the attack looks scary. It takes a lot of nerve to play such a position against a GM.

31...Bf6

An example of how easy it would be to mess this up is: 31...Kg8 32.Rxe7 Bxd4 33.cxd4 and Black would have to take perpetual check.

32.Bxf6

Ballard said Fischer remarked after the game that 32.Qh7+ "would have been much better." Ballard would have needed to be precise, but his king is able to scoot to safety on the kingside as he himself showed: 32...Ke8 33.Qg6+ Kd7 34.Bxf6 exf6 35.Qg7+ Fortunately for black his Q is dominating all the light squares, including f7, and white soon runs out of checks. 35...Kc6 36.Qxf6+ Kb7 37.Re7+ Ka6 38.Qf1+ Rc4 39.Kc1 Qa2 40.Qe2 Qa1+ 41.Kc2 Qa4+ 42.Kc1 Rh8-+ (This analysis was from Ballard.)

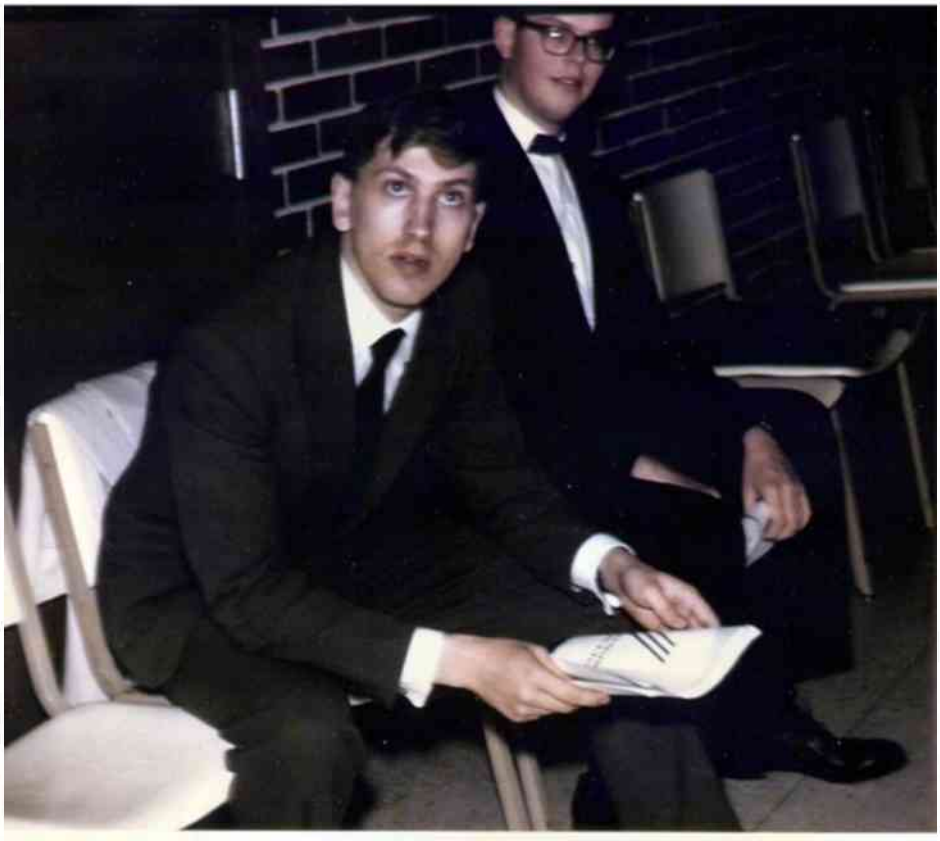
32...Rd1+

Eliminating one of White's important attackers.

33.Rxd1 Qxd1+ 34.Ka2 Rc5!

[After 34...Rc5 Fischer resigned, because 35.Be5+ Ke8 36.Qg6+ Kd8 37.Qg8+ Kd7 Fischer would have been out of checks and faced with ...Ra5+.]

0-1



Fischer and Ballard discussing the game and the analysis from the Shakmatny Bulletin that had played its part in the opening.
(Photo: Balcro.com)

Games from Recent Events

Two Amburgy Annotations Plus Two more Games from D Ballard

Richards, Mike (2100)
Ballard, D LP (2200) [E74]
RRSO # 8 Davis (1.6), 18.04.2010
[Notes by TB]

This was Ballard's first 'serious' OTB game in over 30 years. Frank Berry had talked him into playing in the Red River Shootout in 2008.

He and NM Richards from Texas produce a remarkable game!

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Be2 0-0 6.Bg5 c5 7.d5 e5 8.g4 a6 9.a4 a5 10.f3 Na6 11.Qd2 Nb4 12.0-0-0 Bd7 13.Bd3 Qb6 14.Bb1 Rae8 15.Nge2 Qa6 16.b3 b6 17.Ng3 Qc8 18.h3

[Ballard comments: "I was trying to dominate the Black squares throughout. It was an entirely positional game. When White sacrificed his dark squared Bishop it meant that Black's strategy was justified. Notice that after 18.h3 that all of White's Pawns are on light squares."]

18...Kh8 19.Rdg1 Ng8 20.h4 f6 21.h5 fxg5 22.hxg6 h6 23.Nf5

[Computers eval this position as dynamically equal after white's sac. But both players now take further risks trying to win...]

23...Rf6

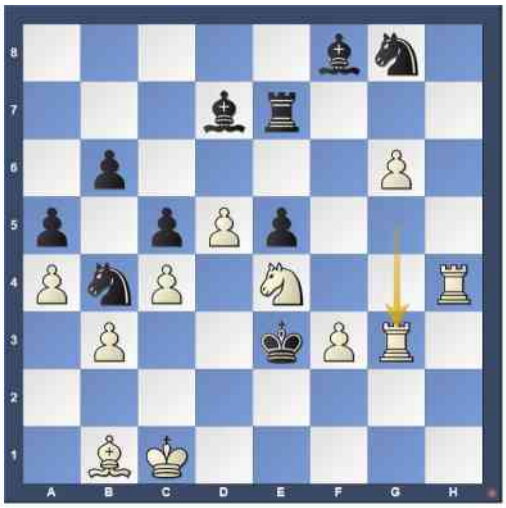
[Too risky. 23...Qd8! to protect g5.]

24.Qxg5 Rxf5 25.exf5 Qd8 26.Ne4 Qxg5+ 27.Nxg5 Bf8 28.Nf7+ Kg7

"And now the Black King's journey begins!"

29.g5 hxg5 30.Rh7+ Kf6 31.Nxd6! Re7 32.Ne4+ Kxf5 33.Rxg5+ Kf4 34.Rh4+ Ke3 35.Rg3

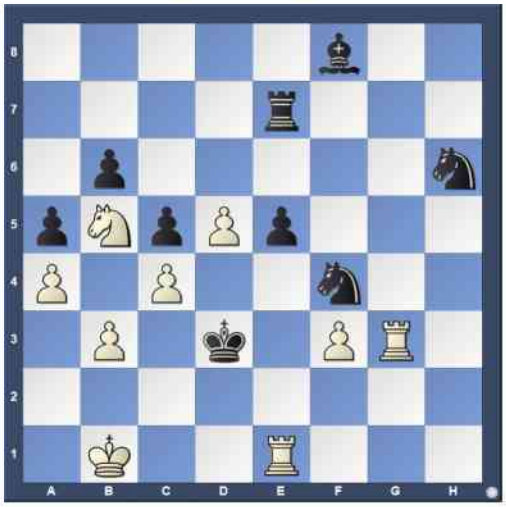
White is winning around here, but the Black King has found a surprisingly secure and annoying spot on e3.



35...Nd3+ 36.Kc2 Nf4 37.Rh1 Bf5 38.Re1+ Kd4 39.Kb2 Bxg6 40.Nd6 Bxb1 41.Kxb1 Nh6 42.Nb5+

[42.Kc2!+-]

42...Kd3= [A remarkable position.]



43.Rgg1 Nf5 44.Re4 Ne3 45.Re1 Ne2! 46.Kb2 Bh6 47.d6 Rg7

[47...Rf7-+ Ballard was in time pressure by now, something he wasn't used to.]

48.Na3

(See Diagram Next Page)

48...Rg2

Who would think such a natural move spoils Black's win? But it leaves him without someone watching white's passed pawn.

[48...Nc3! wins, i.e. 49.Rxe5 *(49.Rh4 Rg2+)* 49...Rg2+ 50.Kc1 Nxc4+ wins.]

49.Nc2 Nd4?

[49...Nxc2 50.Rd1+ Bd2 51.d7 Nc3 52.d8Q+ Nd4=]

50.R4xe3+ Bxe3 51.Rxe3+ Kd2 52.d7 Rg8 53.Rxe5

[White is now winning, but it's a scramble and Ballard almost succeeds in holding it!]

53...Rd8 54.Rd5 Ke2 55.Na3

[55.Nxd4+! cxd4 56.f4 d3 57.Kc3 would have iced it for white.]

55...Nc6 56.Nb5+- Kxf3 57.Rd6 Nb8 58.Rxb6 Nxd7 59.Rd6 Ke4 60.Na7 *[60.Rd5]*

60...Ke5 61.Rd5+ Ke6 62.Nc6 Ra8 63.Kc2 Ra6 64.Nd8+ Ke7 65.Nb7 Ra7 66.Nxc5 Nxc5 67.Rxc5 Kd6 68.Rd5+ Kc6 69.Kc3 Ra8 70.Kd4 Ra7 71.c5 Rh7 72.Rd6+ Kb7 73.Kc4 Rh3 74.Rd3 Rh4+ 75.Rd4

[75.Kb5 Rh5 76.Rd7+ Kb8 77.Kb6+-]

75...Rh3 76.Rd5 Rf3 77.Rd7+ Kc6 78.Rd6+ Kb7 79.Rd4 Rh3 80.b4? axb4 81.Kxb4

Ballard has managed to reach a rook ending that he knew is theoretically drawn -- but only if you have time as the defender to play some very precise moves. But at 5 seconds increment, a time scramble like here it is very difficult for both players.

81...Rh1 82.Rd6 Ra1 83.Rb6+? [83.a5]

83...Kc7 84.Kb5 Rb1+ 85.Ka6 Rc1 86.Rb5 Kc6 87.a5 Rxc5?

[87...Ra1= Draws.]

88.Rxc5+ Kxc5 89.Kb7 1-0

In 2010 Ballard was persuaded to play again in an OKC rapid games tournament. Here he plays a nice game and gives us his annotations, originally published in the Oklahoma Chess Quarterly.

Sullivan, Mike (1900)
Ballard, D LP (2190) [A69]
SCS # 7 OKC (3.1), 07.08.2010

[Notes by Ballard]

Black plays the King's Indian, which gives quite a lot of flexibility as long as Black hits the dark squares strongly. Black's Pawns will be on dark squares in the center: e7 or e5, c7 or c5 and d6. Black will have his dark square Bishop as his bad Bishop in front of his King to protect his King with the chance that it may eventually hit the long dark diagonal. With the dark square Bishop on g7 Black will be less cramped with more room for his other three minor pieces. Even his Queen is already hitting the dark squares from d8. The Pawns around Black's King will be on light squares which with the dark square Bishop will give Black's King a lot of safety and may even allow Black to advance those Pawns. With his King well protected, Black may also advance his Queen side Pawns. Black can adapt to almost anything. White will have to defend his initiative. White will have the advantage of more space and more freedom.]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.f4 0-0 6.Nf3 c5 7.d5 e6 8.Be2 exd5 9.cxd5 Re8

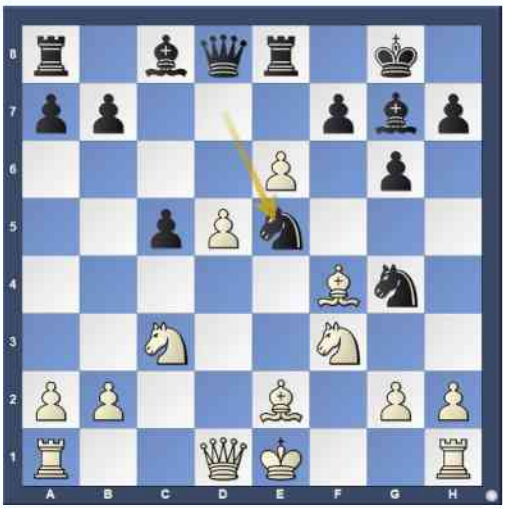
White has played most aggressively and will try to overwhelm Black with a central Pawn

storm. Readers with chess engines will see many interesting variations in the following and likely some missed opportunities for both sides.

10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 Ng4 12.Bf4 Nd7

Here Black could have won a pawn with 12...Nxe5 This would have led to a position without Black's dark square Bishop in which White would still have had the Pawn on d5.

13.e6 Nde5



14.Ng5 Nh6

Black is putting great pressure on White's central Pawns to eliminate their mobility and other possibilities while covering all of the squares around his own King.

15.Qd2 fxe6

Black has enough pressure on the advanced Pawns that he can eliminate one before White completes his development. This lessens White's pressure on f7.

16.0-0-0 Nhf7

The Black Knight on f7 is looking at d6 to blockade the White Pawn on d5. White hinders this but exchanges his forward Knight to do so. Note how well Black is covering the dark squares.

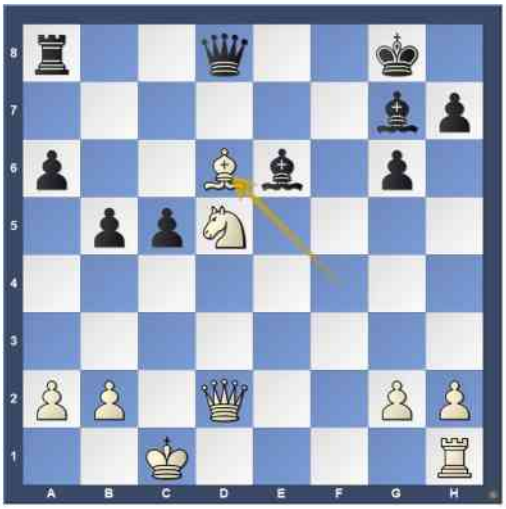
17.Nxf7 Nxf7 18.d6 Bd7

The commanding White Pawn on d6 is now blockaded not by a Knight as preferred but, at least, by a Bishop. A blockaded Pawn cannot move forward regardless of what piece blockades it.]

19.Bc4 a6

At last Black has time to play a6 to get his Queen side Pawns moving. Notice that the Black Knight on f7 not only hits a lot of important squares h6, g5, e5, d6, d8, but also obstructs the diagonal g8-a2 which offers some protection from the White Bishop on c4. The Pawn on a6 also helps prevent White from playing Nb5 or Bb5.

20.Rde1 b5 21.Bxe6? Rxe6 22.Nd5 Nxd6 23.Rxe6 Bxe6 24.Bxd6



24...Ra7

Things have clarified somewhat and some exchanges have occurred. Black is not interested in winning material but in hindering White's initiative. Once this has been done then Black's pieces will become active against White's pieces and King.

25.Nf4 Bxa2

Black captures on a2 more to weaken White's b3 than to take a Pawn. White's King is exposed and has a lot of weak squares around him. If White's initiative fails then White's position will be full of weak squares and uncoordinated pieces.

26.Qe2?

[26.Bxc5 Rd7 27.Qe3 Bh6 28.g3 Bf7-+ Fritz]

26...Bh6

Finally, White's loose position begins to tell. It is important to notice that the White Knight on f4 is protected by the Bishop on d6. Bishops do move backwards, you know.

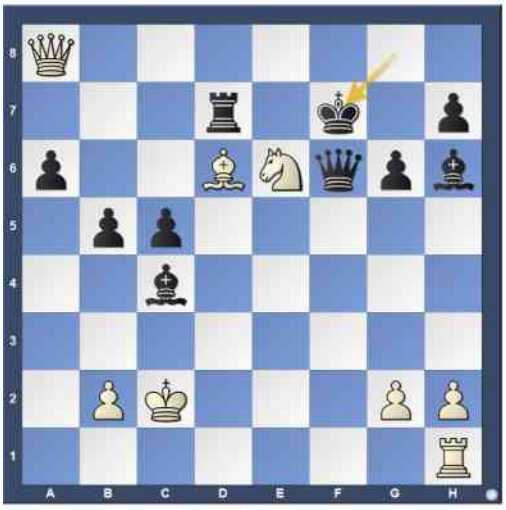
27.Kc2 Bc4

Black plays the Bishop to c4 to give it a place where it is protected. It protects the Black King on the diagonal a2-g8 and hits f1 which might eventually be a good place for White's Rook.

28.Qe4 Rd7

This relieves White's pressure on the d1-d8 file by the White Rook on d1.

29.Ne6 Qf6 30.Qa8+ Kf7



All of the squares around Black's King are protected so that no checks will work. The Black Bishop on c4 even covers f1. Black's Queen even covers h8. White was in time pressure at this point.

(White's central pieces have been left hanging, and have no retreat-TB)

31.Ng5+ Qxg5-+

0-1

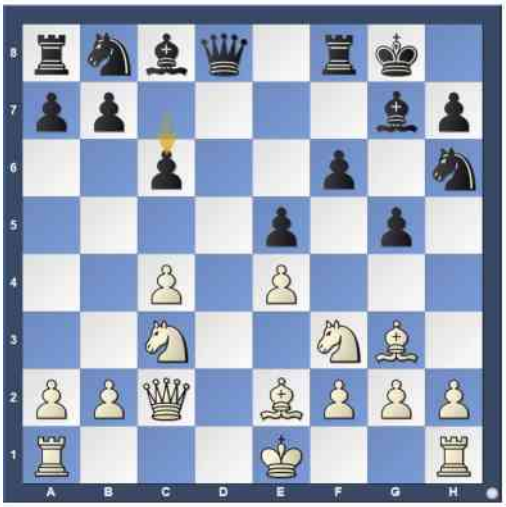
[The continuation 31...Qxg5 32.Qf3+ Qf5+ 33.Qxf5+ gxf5 34.Bxc5 Rd2+ would have increased Black's advantage. The well-protected squares around Black's King and the weak squares around White's King would have really come into effect.]

Amburgy, Ryan (2275)
Luo, Terry (2260) [E92]
Baltimore Open (5), 30.01.2022
[Notes by NM Ryan Amburgy]

1.Nf3

This was the final round of the tournament. I was at 3/4, and knew that if I won, I would have a chance of tying for first if GM Jesse Kraai drew his game.

1...Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.d4 0-0 6.Be2 e5 7.Be3 Ng4 8.Bg5 f6 9.Bh4 g5 10.Bg3 Nh6 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Qc2 c6



13.Nd2

The idea behind Nd2 is to prepare long castling, while also opening up ideas of f3 and h4. Black lacks a great plan already here.

13...Na6 14.0-0-0 Qe7 15.h4

I didn't know it at the time, but this was apparently the first new move, and everyone had played f3 before this. I like h4 better because it prepares to play f4 in one go, rather than being solid with f3. f3 is certainly fine, but I liked h4 even more.

15...g4 16.f4!?

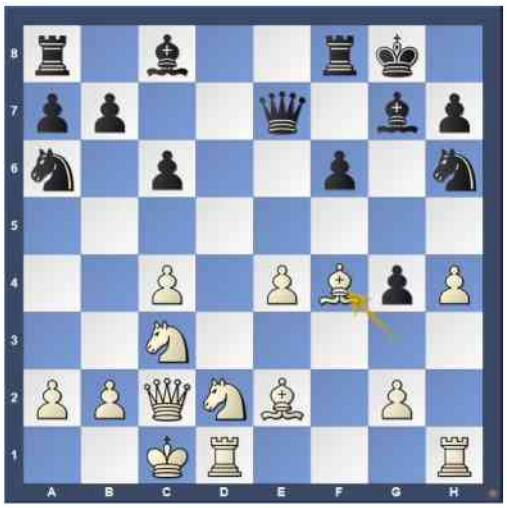
This was my idea behind h4. I open up the center and black has to react accurately.

16...exf4?!

[16...f5 17.Rhf1 Nc5 18.fxe5 Bxe5 19.Bxe5 Qxe5 is relatively even. Black has more active pieces and more space, but his king is

the weaker one. I would say both sides have chances here.

17.Bxf4

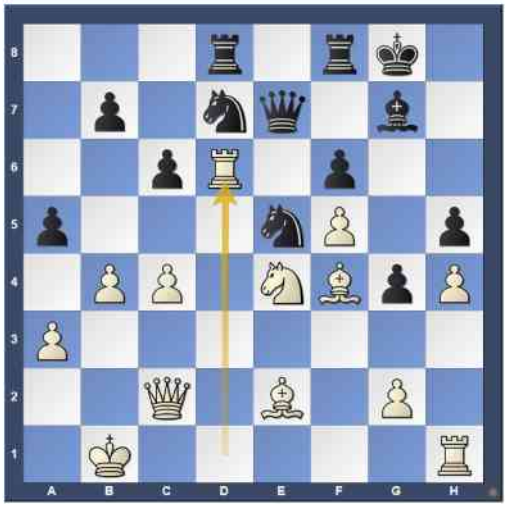


Now I've won the central battle. My pieces are also pretty well placed. My knight on d2 isn't doing much now, so I reroute it to e3.

17...Nf7 18.Nf1 Ne5 19.Ne3 h5 20.Kb1

I was waiting for him to play Be6 so I could gain a tempo protecting my king. He has to take on f5 either way so there wasn't a rush.

20...Be6 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.exf5 Rad8 23.a3 Nc5 24.b4 Ncd7 25.Ne4 a5 26.Rd6



I now have full domination of the position, and i'm threatening a queen trap that he misses.

26...axb4? [A blunder, but the position was pretty much beyond repair regardless]

27.Re6 b3 [27...Qf7 28.Nd6]

28.Qb2 **1-0**

Amburgy, Ryan (2297)
Plotkin, Victor (2380) [D00]
Southwest Class (6), 20.02.2022
[Notes by NM Ryan Amburgy]

1.d4

This was round 6 of the Southwest Class Championship. I am 3/5 at the moment, and needed this win versus a strong opponent to stay in contention.

1...Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.Bf4 c6 4.e3 Bf5 5.f3 h6 6.g4 Bh7 7.h4 e6 8.Bd3 Bd6 9.Nge2 Qc7

10.g5

[10.Bxd6 Qxd6 11.Bxh7 Nxh7 12.e4 Was a little better, but I went for some tactical variations and missed one way black could equalize.]

10...Nh5?

Natural, but leads to a much worse position after a very accurate combination.

[Better was 10...Bxd3! 11.gxf6 Bxe2 12.fxg7 Rg8 13.Nxe2 Bxf4 14.Nxf4 Rxg7 15.Qd3 I thought white was a little better here, but black develops in time to equalize.

11.Bxd6

[11.Bxh7? Nxf4 this move order does not work]

11...Qxd6 12.Bxh7 Rxh7

13.g6! Rh8

[13...fxg6 14.Qd3 Black doesn't have any

answer for Qxg6, which will completely crush blacks position.]

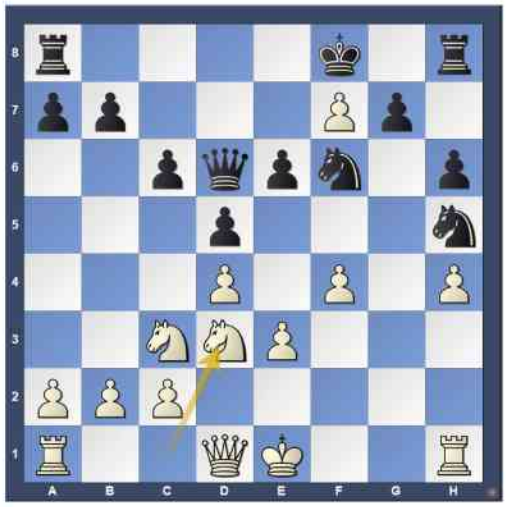
14.gxf7+ Kf8 15.f4 Nd7 16.Nc1

The knight on e2 wasn't doing anything, so I found a better post on d5 for it.

16...Ndf6

[16...Ng3 17.Rh3 Nf5 was probably his last chance to stay in the game]

17.Nd3

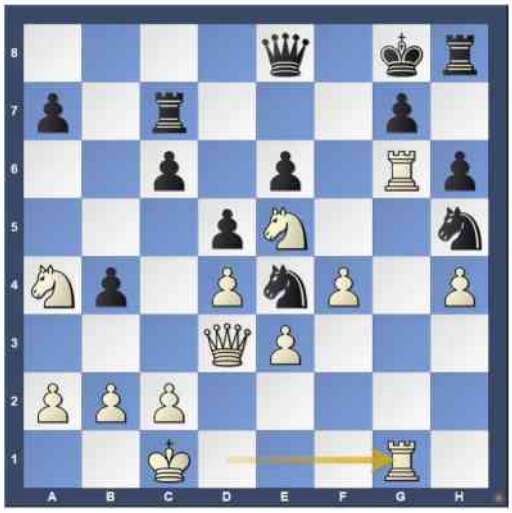


Now I get the knight to e5, and his terribly placed king is what loses him the game.

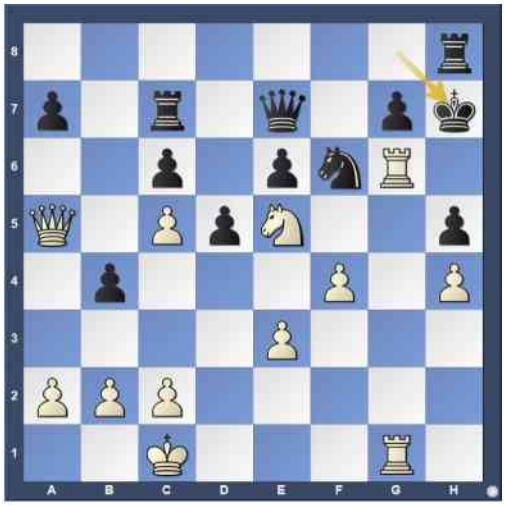
17...Kxf7 18.Ne5+ Kg8 19.Rg1 Rc8 20.Qd3 Rc7 21.Qg6 Qe7 22.0-0-0 Qe8 23.Qd3

[Note the calm play on Ryan's part here.—TB]

b5 24.Rg6 b4 25.Na4 Ne4 26.Rdg1

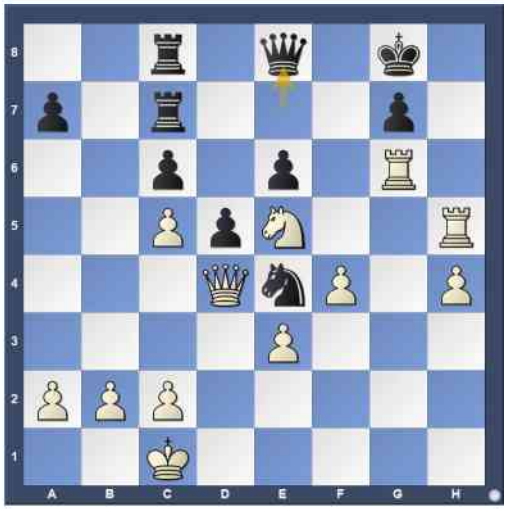


26...Nhf6 27.Qa6 h5 28.Qa5 Qe7 29.Nc5 Nxc5 30.dxc5 Kh7



[Note how Ryan finishes the game with a nice attack, infiltrating into weak squares with the rooks, and taking time to bring back and centralize his queen (always a good idea). — TB]

31.R1g5 Rhc8 32.Qxb4 Ne4 33.Rxh5+ Kg8 34.Qd4 Qe8



35.Rhh6 Re7 36.Nf3 Qd7 37.Qe5 Nf6 38.Qxf6

1-0

Upcoming Tournaments

For more information see www.ochess.org

APR 2-3 2022 OKLAHOMA SENIOR OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP Stroud OK

4-SS, G/90+30. Location: Cattle Country Lodge, 1200 North 8th Avenue, Stroud OK 74079. (Exit 179 from Turner Turnpike). Open to all USCF Members aged 50 and over on April 2, 2022. Top finishing Oklahoma resident is the 2022 Oklahoma State Senior Champion and qualifies to represent state at the 2022 John T. Irwin National Senior Tournament of Champions - held in August at the U.S. Open, with a stipend supporting expenses to attend.
Accelerated pairings may be used based on number of entries. Bring sets and clocks.

Entry: Free to Oklahoma residents; $20 to nonresidents if preregistered, $30 if paid at the door. **Registration:** 9-9:45am Sat 4/2. **Prizes (all guaranteed) - First,** $300, **Second** $200, A: $125 , B: $100, C: $100, D/below/unrated: $100. **Rounds Saturday** 10-2:30; Sunday 9-1:15. **Byes:** No Byes. **Adv. Entries and Info:** **hbrown906@protonmail.com** or mail Harold Brown, 9015 South Maplewood Avenue, Tulsa OK 74137. **Sponsored by Harold Brown Jr. Sanctioned by OCA.** Possible USCF rated Blitz tournament for Seniors after Round 2 Saturday as a side event if sufficient interest. More info on the OCA website at https://www.ochess.org/tournaments

APR 24 2022 MIDTOWN RAPID QUADS #4 Tulsa OK

3-RR "Quads"; G/26+5; Midtown Tulsa Chess Club, 17th and Harvard. Dual-rated. **Monthly** USCF-rated RAPID tournament at Tulsa's Midtown Chess Club -- part of a yearlong **Grand Prix** of USCF-rated Rapids with nice year-end prizes (TBA). Full Details: https://new.uschess.org/midtown-rapid-quads-2

MAY 27-30 77th Annual TEXAS STATE CHAMPIONSHIP Irving, TX

7-SS; G/90+30. Many sections. **Info:** Dallas Chess Club, C/O Barbara Swafford, 2709 Longhorn Trail, Crowley, TX 76036. Info: Barb Swafford, 214-632-9000, info@dallaschess.com www.dallaschess.com https://new.uschess.org/77th-annual-texas-state-and-amateur

JUNE 25-26 JERRY SPANN MEMORIAL (State Championship) Tulsa OK

5-SS; Location: 17 West Hotel, Downtown Tulsa (former Holiday Inn City Center). Details TBA. Check with www.ochess.org

JULY 22-24 KANSAS OPEN Wichita KS

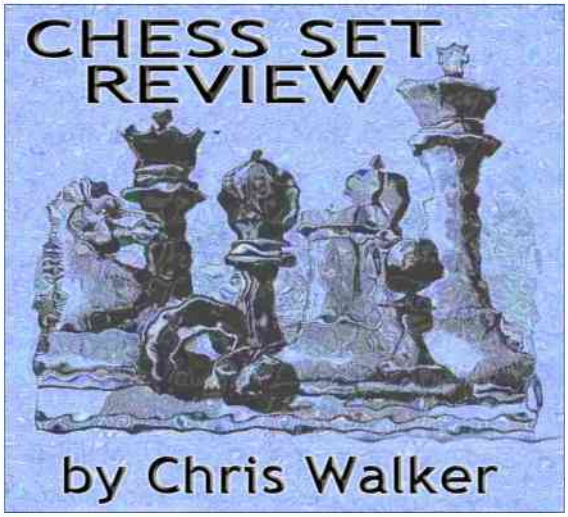
5-SS; Details TBA.

AUG 13/20 STEVE WHARRY CONSAT CLASSIC Tulsa OK

4-SS *split over two consecutive Saturdays.* **G/90+30.** Harvard Avenue Baptist Church, 17th and Harvard, Tulsa. Details TBA.

SEP 10-11 FKB MEMORIAL OKC OK

5-SS. G/90+30. Wyndham Garden Hotel OKC Airport. Details TBA.



The "Mexican Drueke"

The Mexican Drueke

What in tarnation?!

So when did Drueke make a set in Mexico? The answer is that they never did. Yet if you look closely at this picture you'll see this Mexican-made set I bought on Etsy.com (a site for custom-made products of all kinds) is almost exactly like the classic American Drueke "Player's Choice" set I reviewed in the last issue of OCM — except for the odd knights.

The vendor name for this set is ***Professional Tournament Chess***. I prefer the name I gave it.

So how did a guy like me living in Oklahoma come to find this set from Mexico? Funny you ask me this question. I don't shop at the usual places for chess equipment. ***USCF-Sales*** and ***House of Staunton*** are not the only kids on the block selling chess stuff. Sets are made all over the world, and it's amazing what you can find online.

As I said in my review last month, I really love the low center of gravity design of the Drueke classic. This set shares the same design feature, and many pieces are exact copy of the original. The Knight is the only piece that differs significantly from the original Drueke design.

The set is made out of plastic and it might be made out of Bakelite - I'm not sure. Bakelite is no longer made in the U.S. However, it is still made in countries with little to no environmental regulations.

The Knights are the unique things about this set. They don't look anything like the Drueke, with their unusual 'tall' base. Yet they fit well with the classic Drueke-style pieces. So they are a 'new take' on a classic design.

The only other major design change is that the Bishops don't have miter cuts in the bulb head. And you will not see the word DRUEKE molded on top of the Rooks!

The set I bought is "Brown and Beige." The Brown is like a dark roast coffee bean brown. The Beige is similar the Bakelite Butterscotch color of the original Druekes. The set is quite heavy for its size — 2.64 lbs for a set with a 3½ inch King, as in the Drueke classic. The felt is dark brown for both colors and is thick.

This set is hitting all of the right buttons for me! Weight, Height, Color, and Design. Of course there is no set that is 100% to my liking. My only gripe about this set is the lack of traditional miter cuts in the Bishop's head. Oh and of course the cost of the set was a real setback — $79.90. Over-priced, but I did get more than just pieces with this purchase. I got a vinyl board in green and white with 2-inch squares, along with a small brown bag. There are several other options.

The color combination I chose is what I liked the most. The price was a hard pill to swallow but now I have the set in hand.

I am truly happy that I made the purchase. It's a set that will not get confused with others used in tournaments and clubs.

By IM John Donaldson

Three New Player Game Collections from Thinkers Publishing

Thirty years ago, all the major chess book publishers had tournament books and games collections in their catalogues. This is much less common today when smaller companies like McFarland and Elk and Ruby specialize in these areas. Therefore, it was a pleasant surprise to see Thinkers Publishing https://thinkerspublishing.com/, best known for its opening and improvement books, recently publish three game collections.

Miguel Najdorf

The first, ***Miguel Najdorf - El Viejo - Life, Games & Stories*** ($49), by Grandmaster Zenon Franco Ocampos, is a massive (720 pages) work, devoted to one of the most important chess figures of the 20th century.

Najdorf left his mark in seemingly every area of chess. One of the top ten players in the world for several decades he was number two in the West behind Sammy Reshevsky for many years after WW2. The first six Olympiad Najdorf played in, half for Poland and half for Argentina, saw his teams have a podium finish as he additionally won three gold medals for best performance on his board.

Najdorf's two volume series on the 1953 Candidates is the equal of David Bronstein's more famous work, but for many years was only available in Spanish, limiting its readership. Who can forget the variation that bears his name, the favorite of Fischer and Kasparov and countless other top players.

One could also mention the historic blindfold exhibitions Najdorf gave in the 1940s to generate publicity in the hope it would get word to his family and relatives of his whereabouts. Sadly, they all perished in the Holocaust.

There have been several earlier books on Najdorf, including by one of his daughters, but Franco's book will become the standard on this larger-than-life figure. He covers all of Najdorf's career from his early days in Poland as a teenager to his play in the 1980s, when while in his 70s he still played 2500+ level chess. The major emphasis of this book is examining the many beautiful and important games Najdorf played, but Franco also provides much biographical information, which puts Don Miguel's life and chess results into context.

One of the things that makes this book especially valuable, is the objectivity the author shows both in his annotations and when writing about Najdorf's life. This is not easy as Franco's subject is a complicated man. In the introduction he references Yasser Seirawan's *Chess Duels*, where the American Grandmaster writes about the two sides of Garry Kasparov, one very good and the other best avoided. So, it was with Najdorf, who it has to be first mentioned, showed superhuman strength in starting his life over when family and friends were wiped out by the Nazis.

Najdorf did tremendous things for chess in Argentina, but also engaged in behavior that would not have

been tolerated by others. Two examples, that are included not in this book, make this abundantly clear.

Emmanuel Neiman in *The Magnus Method* on page 24 relates a story told to him by the Argentine Women Grandmaster Claudia Amura. She played Najdorf in a rapid tournament in Buenos Aires and was crushing him before a large number of spectators. Just before the loss was imminent, he stood up and shook her hand and said loudly: 'Well played…I accept the draw!' A draw which had not been offered! One doesn't correct a chess god with a large group of his fans in close proximity.

This incident took place near the end of Najdorf's life but he had been engaging in these sorts of tricks long before. Here is another example, which first appeared at https://www.chess.com/article/view/more-cracked-grandmaster-tales which is related by International Master Jeremy Silman who played Najdorf at Lone Pine in 1976.

He paints the scene after White's 30th move…

Black has a very comfortable position, and though I didn't know what his last move did, I was intent on figuring out its purpose. However, after a bit of a think I looked up and stared at my opponent (I had plenty of time on the clock and decided to indulge myself). I was thinking, "Wow, I'm actually playing Najdorf. How cool is that? What can be better than this!?"

At that moment Najdorf looked me in the eye and screamed (so everyone in the whole room could hear it), "Why are you looking at me, little boy? Why are you looking at me?"

Needless to say, Silman immediately blundered and lost horribly, but Najdorf was very nice to him afterward!

These two incidents sound right out of the playbook of Sammy Reshevsky and maybe the suffering their generation endured partly explains their bad behavior. However, there is no confusing these two giants. Reshevsky was the better player (he easily won their first match in 1952 but had a much harder time the second time around, winning the rematch winning 9 ½ - 8 ½), but in all other areas of chess and life Don Miguel came out ahead.

Miguel Najdorf - El Viejo - Life, Games & Stories is a great book and playing through these instructive games cannot fail to both entertain and instruct the reader.

Albin Planinc

While Miguel Najdorf is known to even present-day players such is the not the case with the Slovenian grandmaster Albin Planinc, the subject of a 407 pages biography and games collection by Georg Mohr and Adrian Mikhalchisin. ***Forgotten Genius - The Life and Games of Grandmaster Albin Planinc*** **($41),** like the previous work on Najdorf, benefits greatly from having one of its authors (Mohr) having known Planinc in his formative years.

Who was Albin Planinc? He was one of the shining stars of the chess world in the early 1970s who first attracted attention when he unexpectedly one Ljubljana 1969 ahead of a strong field despite being a last-minute addition to the event.

While Planinc's career at the top did not last long (less than a decade) he produced a number of remarkable attacking games that are still remembered to this day.

I still remember seeing the following miniature in Pal Benko's writeup of Hastings

in *Chess Life & Review.*

Vaganian - Planinc Hastings 1974/75

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.Nf3 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.Ndb5 0-0 7.a3 Bxc3+ 8.Nxc3 d5 9.Bg5 h6 10.Bxf6 Qxf6 11.cxd5 exd5 12.Qxd5 Rd8 13.Qf3 Qb6 14.Rd1 Rxd1+ 15.Nxd1 Nc6 16.Qe3 Nd4 17.Qe8+ Kh7 18.e3 Nc2+ 19.Kd2 Bf5 20.Qxa8 Qd6+ 21.Kc1 Na1 22.Qxb7 Qc7+!! 0-1

Not long after this game was published my family moved from Tacoma to Cincinnati where I met Richard Horvitz, Hans Multhopp and Perry Sill who further introduced me to Planet Planinc, a world where the only openings allowed were razor sharp systems like the Modern Benoni and King's Indian against 1.d4 and the Archangel variation of the Ruy Lopez against 1.e4. Planinc was also an inveterate 1.e4 attacker who played in the tradition of the young Mikhail Tal.

Unfortunately, Planinc stay at the top was brief due to mental illness. ***However, his name will live forever thanks in part to this book, which features many deeply annotated games and extensive biographical material.***

Vladimir Okhotnik

Ukranian-French Grandmaster Vladimir Okhotnik is less known to the chess world than Najdorf and Planinc and he never reached their lofty heights.

Those who do know his name may associate it with success in the World Senior Championship, which he won twice the past decade. The first, in 2011, earned him the GM title, fitting for a player whose rating fluctuated between 2380 and 2500 for over three decades, not dropping dramatically as he aged like so many of his peers.

That may be in part because the author has not lost his zest for chess, be it study or playing. This comes through in

It Is Never Too Late to Become A Grandmaster (317 pages, $ 41)

… which features 65 of the Okhotnik's games coupled with extensive reminiscences. The Ukranian-French GM has, throughout his career, played opening systems that the average player will be able to relate to better than those seen at the very top (Berlin Ruy, Petroff etc.). A lifelong devotee of 1.e4 he has stuck with his favorites for decades including the 2.c3 Sicilian, Exchange French and the Italian Game.

Although Okhotnik has represented France since the 1990s, he is a product of the Soviet School of Chess and has many interesting stories to tell about chess life in the former USSR, in particular in his native ***Ukraine***.

Excerpts of all three of these nicely produced books, which feature clear and crisp photos, can be found at:

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